



Looking Back and Moving Forward

Dear Colleagues,

Last week marked one year since our campuses abruptly shut down and transitioned to remote teaching and working due to a raging pandemic in our country. As California and the world went on lockdown, we scrambled to move our classes online, quickly mobilizing to provide training and support so our students could continue their education.

We never imagined that we would still be largely remote a year later.

In the past year, many of us have faced heartache, hardship, loneliness, and despair. Yet all of us learned to adapt to a new kind of world where wearing a face covering and keeping a physical distance from others has become routine. We learned to accept uncertainty and ambiguity, and employees and students who are also parents learned to cope with balancing the demands of work and school while caring for their children. We found ourselves taking on new roles: homeschool teachers, caretakers, day care providers, chefs, interior designers, master gardeners, and referees.

Through it all, I have admired how our employees have responded to these most challenging of circumstances. The innovation and flexibility that our employees exhibited in those first turbulent days has continued throughout the year as we realized that this pandemic was not going away any time soon. Hundreds of faculty members honed their skills so they could teach remotely. We found new ways to assist students, offering virtual campuses that provided a full array of services including help desks, online counseling, and tutoring. Zoom conferences became a part of our working lives, and hardly a day passed without someone saying, "You're on mute."

We also reaffirmed our commitment to support the needs of students and our community through the most difficult of circumstances. Thousands of students received free laptops, internet access, and emergency scholarships so they could continue their education. The District added wireless access in the college parking lots for students who could not access the internet from their homes. The District also continued to serve the community, including loaning ventilators from the Grossmont College Respiratory Therapy program to local hospitals,

serving as COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites, and hosting numerous food drives for students and community members struggling with food insecurities.

I want to again express deep appreciation to our faculty, staff and administrators for your extraordinary dedication, creativity and resilience as we worked together this past year on behalf of our students. I appreciate your willingness to find new ways to continue to serve our students and each other.

Planning for Returning to Campus

With the availability of vaccines to fight COVID-19, we can start to see the light at the end of the pandemic and ramp up our planning to begin returning to the Grossmont and Cuyamaca College campuses. I know many of us look forward to seeing people in the same room instead of on a computer screen! If you have been unable to get an appointment for a vaccination, I urge you to keep trying.

Through the [DEC Emergency Response Planning Group](#), four teams have been meeting to plan for returning to in-person classes and services at some level this fall. Although our public health situation has been steadily improving and our county has moved to a less restrictive tier, there is still some uncertainty. Therefore, we are proceeding with caution as we plan for returning to some normalcy so that we can be ready to welcome students back to the campuses. Thank you to our team leads and the representatives from our constituency groups who have been involved in these important discussions.

Following is a summary of some of the recommendations from the repopulation teams. The Chancellor's Cabinet and the DEC Emergency Planning group will review the recommendations to determine the next steps for implementation.

Facilities: Led by Sahar Abushaban, Bill McGreevy, and Nicole Salgado

- Engage SC Engineers to assess the mechanical systems that provide ventilation and provide recommendations on what filters are needed and potentially adding air purifiers to classrooms, offices and other spaces.
- Equip classrooms, as needed, to be capable of distance learning, with a demonstration classroom set up on each campus to be evaluated by users.
- Add signage for queuing, directions for waiting areas and wayfinding, and social distancing.
- Add permanent outdoor wireless access districtwide.
- Identify locations where outdoor classes could be held.
- Designate outdoor study areas, waiting areas, and areas for food and drinks.
- Purchase tents and furniture for outdoor areas.
- Purchase additional portable toilets and hand-washing stations for athletics.
- Install wall hand sanitizers at exterior building doors and in high-traffic areas and provide wipes in every room. Supply personal protective equipment (PPE) vending machines districtwide.

- Provide students with masks and wipes when needed, and designate areas where they can be picked up.
- Sanitize space and equipment per guidelines by the Centers for Disease Control and recommend that students and staff wipe furniture before and after use.
- Assess which high volume use doors should be made automatic or touchless.
- Assess the staffing needs for returning including: a COVID-19 Coordinator/Safety Specialist at each campus, Custodians, Instructional Media Support, CAPS, and District Information Technology.

Employee Relations: Led by Tim Corcoran

- Lead efforts to identify available facilities to ensure distancing between employees.
- Communicate flexible scheduling for employees to reduce the number of employees working in an office at the same time for spaces that cannot accommodate sufficient distancing.
- Prioritize enhanced support for mental health issues as we repopulate. Support for mental health needs will be addressed through a multitude of venues in upcoming months.
- Provide training and communication in areas of quarantine and other COVID-19 related topics.

Instruction: Led by Marshall Fulbright, Manuel Mancillas-Gomez, Alicia Munoz, and Denise Schulmeyer

- Implement a phased-in approach to return to campus, focusing on those classes that are hard to convert to the remote modality.
- Offer multiple modality options for scheduling of classes.
- Assess equipment that has been dormant for a year to make sure it is working properly.
- Continue professional development for remote/online instruction.
- Ensure adequate levels of additional instructional support.
- Provide IT support for maintaining laptops and cameras in the classrooms.
- Provide spaces on campus for students who are taking remote classes.
- Ensure that all content is accessible/ADA compliant.
- Ensure that other services are available (e.g., library, printing services, food services).
- Set a deadline for deciding whether to hold classes remotely or in person and staying with that modality throughout the semester.

Student Services: Led by Jessica Robinson and Aaron Starck

- Develop an appointment-only system for students, then transitioning to a QLess system.
- Set up docking stations for employees who may be working both at home and on campus.

- Standardize software for electronic forms so that forms can go paperless.
- Formulate staff rotation plans.

American Rescue Plan

We are pleased that our District will receive about \$40 million in one-time federal funds from the American Rescue Plan to offset the impacts of COVID-19. The bill specifies that 50% of these funds must go directly to students that have been impacted by the pandemic to offset costs for food, rent, childcare, transportation, and loss of jobs. A top priority for the one-time institutional funds will be critical infrastructure and technology needs essential for a safe return to campus, as identified by the repopulation teams and leadership.

The District will have until September 2023 to spend the funds. We will continue to keep you informed of these efforts as the planning progresses.

While we have much work to do to prepare to safely reopen our campuses, I am confident that we will continue to work as a team to get there. I am also certain that no matter how we serve our students in the months ahead, they will continue to receive a high-quality education and caring support from our employees.

Thank you for your dedication and all your efforts to give students hope for a better future.

Sincerely,

Lynn

Lynn Ceresino Neault, Ed.D.
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